

## Our Slipping Zone Seven

There seems to be a disconnect when we think, read, speak of climate change. On the one hand it is cast as a possible situation in the distant future, or even a mere glitch in an expected cycle. Others avoid thinking too much about the problem on the assumption that if it happens, there is little that can be done about it. The truth is that climate change is here, right now, and a lot can be, and is being done about it.

Literally hundreds of solutions are not only being proposed, but are underway and if we are not encouraged, it is because we are not paying attention! Gardeners are aware of changes brought about by global warming because they are seeing it under their hands and feet. Many northern gardeners are seeing warming temperatures and more rain as the answer to growing fruit that a few decades ago only flourished further south.

One small example given in an article by a scientist about her garden was that maple sugaring season used to begin after the Town Meeting Day, the first Tuesday in March, and now it begins before that traditional day. Since temperature is the clue that starts plant and animal growth in the garden, dormancy ends and active growth begins not on a calendar date but when the optimal temperature has arrived. Growth itself is something that begins on the cell level where proteins and hormones respond to temperature.

As these climate changes are both intricate and subtle, it is too soon for back-and front-yard gardeners to understand precisely what the pluses and minuses may be. It is difficult for us know how best to prepare our gardens for potential changes. It is not only the plant environment that will change, but the fungi, pathogens, and insect pests will also present new challenges.

The March 2009 issue of 'Garden Design', that magazine of unaffordable and unattainable gardening elegance, has an article, "A Change in the Weather" about the effects of global warming on our gardens. The author quotes Peter Del Tredici, senior research scientist at Harvard's Arnold Arboretum, "it's a mistake to think of climate change as this thing that's going to happen. It's already here."

According to Frank Lowenstein, a senior manager in The Nature Conservancy's conservation strategies division, "Climate change is consistently moving faster than predicted. We'll see very dramatic changes even over the next ten to twenty years. By 2100, Minneapolis could potentially have a climate like San Francisco."

That is a positive perhaps but Kudzu spreading north, no more cranberry bogs, ultra-toxic poison ivy, along with mega storms, may give us pause? Water availability, use and misuse will be a critical issue in the future, and even in our water-rich area drought may be a problem. The USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map is not yet available but we may venture a guess: welcome to Zone Eight.

**SHAMROCKS!** This is the week that everyone is Irish! It might be mentioned that Ireland is one of the European countries that is making a considerable effort to reduce its carbon footprint. The figure given by the Wall Street Journal for our plastic shopping bag addiction is 100 billion a year. That is a lot of plastic and I expect the WSJ has an economist on staff who could tell us how many gallons of oil are required to produce that many bags?

I have a bag, caught up in a branch, I am not sufficiently athletic to dislodge, a reminder of the bag blight. Deciding that plastic bags were a nuisance, the Irish government initiated a 'plas-tax'. Roughly equivalent to 29 of our pennies, that made a difference in a hurry. By reusing bags, string bags, canvas bags, the Irish eliminated 90% of the plastic bags, a savings of one million gallons of oil. We hope that some trash bags will stay with us until our recycling is so sophisticated we can just sort our household debris into permanent containers and have them toted away?